



Exclusive Interview

The US Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs speaks to the Key newspaper



Victoria Nuland, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs at the United States Department of State, visited Nouakchott last week as the head of a

high-level delegation. She met with President Mohamed Ould Cheikh Mohamed Ahmed Ould Ghazouani, several political figures, and representatives from civil society groups. The Key , the

only English-language newspaper in Mauritania, conducted an exclusive interview with Undersecretary Nuland.

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Imraguen People in the Atlantic Coast of Mauritania



Imraguen (or Imragen): ethnic group of Mauritania living in some dozens of fishing villages in the Ban D'Arguin National Park of Mauritania; largest coastal park in Africa with a surface area of 12,000 km², the Park, which is said to be a “treasure trove of marine life”, was declared a world heritage site by UNESCO in 1989. It boasts one of the world’s largest concentrations of fish, molluscs, crustaceans, turtles, as well as sharks, species of rays, and dolphins.

Mauritania waters are among the few left in the world which are still well-stocked with fish. Fishing fleets from Western countries often obtain the fishing rights, employ local fishermen and then freeze the catch to be sent elsewhere for processing, mainly to North Africa and Europe.

The word “Imragen” is derived from a Berber lexis meaning “fisherman” or “people who fish while walking on the sea”. They are traditionally supposed to be from the degrading the lower-caste status of Znaga. Fishing is their industry from generation to generation; they used to whistle some fish like dolphins to bring them near the shore and catch all the mullets that followed the dolphins.

Imragen live amongst dugout canoes, nets; hooks or artisanal boats. Today, despite the latest fishing policies of Mauritania, the Imraguen are the only citizens owning the full right to fish in the Banc D'Arguin area due to the fact that they use their traditional fishing techniques.

Fundamentally, Imraguen are nomad fishers who move their small villages of makeshift huts to follow the movements of large shoals of golden mullet and croaker along the Arguin Bank on the northern coast of Mauritania. Unlike the majority Mauri people-the original Berber population-who practice pastoral farming, Imraguen depend on fishing for their sustenance. The Banc d'Arguin is a Natural Reserve and is peculiar because the deeper water rich in minerals comes to the surface, and it is an ideal breeding ground for every fish.

The country’s latest fishing policies side for allowing Imraguen to fish in the park with their lanches, boats with sails and no motor, but in the season when large shoals of mullet are passing, from the end of October to early January, they still use the spectacular traditional method. A dozen or so men get into the water holding a long net that surrounds the

shoal of mullet, and close it around them. In the past times, a man from the village would act as a lookout from the shore, and dolphins would help the fishermen to drive the mullet towards the coast.

Fishing is a male activity in Mauritania. According to the tradition, men deal with the fishing with nets, while women have always been involved in producing roe, “tishtar” (small pieces of dried and crumbled mullet) and mullet oil, with a particular technique passed on from mother to daughter. However, traditional fishing without using boats and the sustainable non-polluting method using lanches is threatened by the pressure of industrial fishing boats entering the waters of the Arguin Bank illegally.

Traditional knowledge connected to the transformation of mullet is being lost, resulting in the disappearance of a significant element of Imraguen cultural identity. To prevent this, the NGO Mauritanie 2000 committed to improve existing techniques of transformation of products in this sector, without affecting the socio-cultural reality of these populations. According to Slow Food (Organization), the Presidium is based on a cooperative of Imraguen women-assisted by a local NGO, Mauritanie 2000-who live in Nouadhibou, the second largest city in Mauritania. The Presidium producers buy mullet from the fishers and transform it. Their work is currently underpaid – the roe is bought for a ridiculously low price by an intermediary and sold abroad-and their production facilities are precarious.

Slow Food, with the collaboration of the Presidium producers of bottarga in Orbetello, is trying to help the Imraguen women to improve the product quality. In 2006 three

women visited Orbetello for a training course and some Italian fishermen went to Nouadhibou to help equip a small workshop. The objective is to find alternative markets and directly manage the sale of transformed products.

Living within the park and with no freshwater, the Imraguen have, over the years, been dependent on supplies collected outside the park or from those provided by the navy, said a report by witnesses on ground.

Traditionally, the men deal with the fishing of mullet and shade-fish in the shallow waters of the park whilst the women produce roe, tishtar (small pieces of dried and crumbled mullet) and mullet oil, passing on this knowledge and techniques to their children, the report added.

With wooden sailboats or just wading into the shallows and flinging their nets, the men have maintained their traditional fishing methods, including working with dolphins to catch more fish.

As ecofund.org writes: “From the shore, when a man indicates the passage of a school of fish, others enter the water with nets on their shoulders. By striking the water with sticks, they attract dolphins which create a barrier that prevent fish from escaping to sea. Driven to the shore, the mullets are surrounded by men and captured.

“Upon capture, the fish are opened, cleaned and dried by women. Every part of the fish is valued, including the ovaries of pregnant females, slightly salted and dried to make the “poutargue”, and the head and organs, boiled in water to extract an oil rich in trace elements and vitamins known as “dhên”.”

It is documented that a few generations ago,

the Imraguen used to whistle the dolphins to bring them near the shore and catch all the mullets that always followed the dolphins.

In recent years, this cooperation between the Imraguen and the dolphins as well as other traditional fishing methods seems to be dying due to threats from immigrant and industrial fishing activities. What is more, competition and the high demand for shark and ray fins compelled some Imraguen to shun their traditional practices and move towards motorized shark hunting.

In the late 1990s, shark fins were in greater demand, especially in the Asian market. Believed to give strength and vigor to men, reports said a kilo could cost \$500. With concerns from conservationists and NGOs in the early 2000s, the Imraguen agreed to hand over their nets in return for cash to preserve the shark and ray species in the Park.

But not without concerns.

“In just one day, I used to capture 400 rays with my nets which are going to be banned from now on. What I will receive (as compensation) I will get only once. I used to get money every day from this fishing,” a 71-year-old fisherman, Soueilim Ould Bilal, said in 2004.

Nevertheless, with their desire to respect and guard the riches of the Park, the Imraguen have returned to their traditional fishing activities, resorting to mullet and shade-fish from the park’s waters.

The number of fishes caught for each species is limited and strongly reinforced by the Mauritanian authorities. In 2004, the Imraguen people agreed to preserve the shark and ray species in the Banc d'Arguin National Park (which became a UNESCO world heritage site in 1989) and traded their nets for money.

The Imraguen people blame the new oil and gas explorations around the Banc d'Arguin area, along with a new road adjacent to the area, as the main factors for the reduction of fish reproduction in the area.

What strikes the most is, Imraguen people (of about 10,000 individuals) are still unknown to Mauritians in general; two-third of Mauritians ignore about their existence. Whereas they are not only fishing traditionally, but they own philosophies of fishing, therapizing with fish oil, dry fish powder or seashore sand. On top of all, should you visit Imraguen villages, you will get back home with unstressed mind as a blank-stale. Otherwise, at the Arkeiss village, it is possible for tourists to practice «sports fishing» in the Banc d'Arguin and gather up to 5 kilos of fish.

Senior Correspondant
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Victoria Nuland, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs at the United States Department of State, visited Nouakchott last week as the head of a high-level delegation. She met with President Mohamed Ould Cheikh Mohamed Ahmed Ould Ghazouani, several political figures, and representatives from civil society groups. The Key, the only English-language newspaper in Mauritania, conducted an exclusive interview with Undersecretary Nuland.

The key : What is Your Excellency's assessment of American-Mauritanian relations? What are the objectives behind your visit to Mauritania?

First of all, we had a great day today. We had a chance to meet with the President, the Foreign Minister, and the Prime Minister, and, in addition, we talked with many human rights activists, as well as young entrepreneurs and those who are promoting entrepreneurship here in Mauritania. The relationship between Mauritania and the United States is strong; it's based on common values. We have one of the strongest security partnerships in the

region, both on the military side and on the counter terrorism side. We are really pleased to see Mauritania able to maintain its own security, something that has been challenging for some other countries in the region. Mauritania, I would say, is a beacon of democracy, and a beacon of security, in this part of the world. Not only that, but we are also beginning to see more of the kind of American investments here in Mauritania that we would like to see, particularly with the investment in offshore gas. We want to attract more investment in this country, and there is certainly much more we can do together. Green technology, agriculture, the education sector, to name just a few. The United States is Mauritania's partner in these areas and more – I'd also add human rights, and education.

The key : Mauritania is currently preparing for national and local elections. Are you satisfied with Mauritaniens' access to democracy?

This is one of the things President Ghazouani and I touched on in our meeting this morning. The important thing about elections is the access. Ensuring that every eligible voter is able to register, that they understand their rights as citizens, that they are able to get to the polls and vote on election day – and of course, that every vote counts. As you know, every democracy can be challenged on this front. In the United States, we are heading towards elections on November 8, and we are

working on voting rights too – it's a part of what good governance is about, making sure we deliver for our citizens.

The key : Mauritania is a key partner country for the United States in the Sahel, a region at the crossroads of humanitarian, security, and climate crises. What is the U.S. position on what is happening in the Sahel, especially the impact of growing Russian influence in the region?

We are really concerned. Russia has not been a good friend to the Sahel countries. It has not been a good friend in carrying out the war against Ukraine. The trickle-down effects of this war are felt all over the world, but particularly in Africa, in terms of higher prices for food, energy prices going up, the increased difficulty with access to food and fertilizer, and so on. And then of course, in this region, where Wagner, the Russian group, has inserted itself – with its guns, its rapacious economic practices, and its horrible human rights abuses – we are really very concerned. We're equally concerned about what's going on in the Central African Republic and Mali, because Wagner is not an organization that wishes these countries well. It is only about itself. Wagner steals resources and does whatever it needs to do, including abusing the local population and stealing the sovereignty of governments and people, to make itself

rich. And it does so at the behest of President Putin. What it's doing in the Ukraine crisis is even worse. We have all heard reports of Russian officials walking around neighborhoods looking for recruits, taking men off the street to fight in the war. The war is immensely unpopular even in Russia. So, as I said, we are quite concerned about Russian influence here, and we know that Mauritania is sending the message very strongly both in Mali and in other parts of Africa, that getting involved with Wagner is poison to any country.

The key : What is your view of the role that women can play in the various crises affecting the Sahel?

Women can and should play a role in all fields. As a country, we are at our best – only when everybody is participating. To reach our potential as a society, we need to be able to tap into everyone's potential, including women, if our democracy is going to be strong. Otherwise, you are just leaving energy, talent, and creativity on the ground. We are particularly focused on the new law to protect the rights of women and girls, to ensure that they know their rights. Equal education and opportunities must be the same for little girls and boys, so they can grow into their full potential. I am pleased to have this chance to work with a woman journalist in Mauritania! I salute you as being a pioneer in your field.

Who is the new prime minister of Great Britain, Rishi Sunak?

Rishi Sunak, the finance minister in Boris Johnson's cabinet, has already assumed the position of British prime minister, but who is he, what are his credentials, and where is he from originally? Although he was born in Southampton in 1980, his dark skin reveals that he is descended from an Indian immigrant family because his ancestors first traveled to East Africa from the Punjab in northwest India before moving to England with his parents in the 1960s. Britannica reports that his mother had a pharmacy and that his father was a general practitioner. By getting married to Akshata Murthy, the daughter of wealthy Indian billionaire and co-founder of the IT giant Infosys, Narayana Murthy, Sunak boosted the wealth of his family. While Sunak was doing his MBA at Stanford University, he



and Akshata became friends. According to the Sunday Times, the couple amassed a fortune worth 730 million pounds (\$877 million) in 2022 as a result of his commercial success and his wife's 0.91% ownership in Infosys. Sunak worked as an analyst at Goldman Sachs after graduating from Oxford University in 2001.

Sunak began his political career with the Conservative Party in 2010, and in 2014, he was chosen as the Conservative Party candidate for the House of Commons representing Richmond in North Yorkshire, a seat in northern England previously held by long-time party leader (1997-2001) William Hague.

He voted three times in favor of the proposal for Britain to leave the European Union when Prime Minister Theresa May was in office, making him one of the Brexit proponents.

In the Ministry of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy from 2015 to 2017, he served as a Parliamentary Special Secretary and a member of the Environmental, Food, and Rural Affairs Select Committee.

He was appointed as the State Undersecretary in the Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government in January 2018, which was his first ministerial role.

The Mauritania's political parties consensus for 2023 elections

In light of the impending parliamentary, local, and regional elections, Mauritania's political parties gathered at the interior ministry's headquarters to celebrate the outcomes of the political dialogue.

Government representatives who attended this occasion included the interior minister, Mr. Mohamed Ahmed Mohamed Lemine, who presided over the negotiations on the government's behalf.

The document pertaining to the parliamentary, municipal, and local elections was read by Ms. Mentata Hadid, president of the Republic Party of Democracy and Renewal.

The terms of the agreed-upon deal primarily addressed the following issues: proportionality in parliamentary, municipal, and regional elections. the national youth board. Nouakchott's location voting deadlines and an impartial national election commission. the election results. the support of political campaigns.

The parties have agreed that half of the National Assembly would be chosen proportionally, while the other half will be elected in a two-round direct election mechanism.

The parties formed a new list with 11 seats for youths of both sexes, two of which are set aside for those with special needs.

The parties also agreed to divide Nouakchott city into three electoral parts, each with seven seats, for a total of 21 representatives for Nouakchott, a three-seat increase from the current position.

The parties engaged in the dialogue have decided that the Independent National Elections Committee



should be established by October 31, 2022, to allow for adequate election preparation.

In terms of election deadlines, the parties have agreed that they should be established later by the Independent National Elections Committee, political parties, and the government, taking into account the rain season and temperature degrees.

An electoral census was agreed upon by the parties, the elections commission, and the government. The government also agreed, at least in theory, to contribute to campaign financing.

A promise from the government to give the Independent National Elections Committee all the authority and resources required to guarantee a fair election was contained in the agreement text.

For the representation of the Mauritanian diaspora, the parties also pushed for direct elections. A realistic logistical strategy should also be developed by the government

in conjunction with the parties and the Independent National Elections Committee, if this is possible.

As agreed upon by the parties, political parties are permitted to take part in each phase prior to suggesting candidates for election posts. Along with treating them with respect, permitting participants from every list of rivals to participate in the process in total transparency, and making it simple for them to be modified when necessary.

Furthermore, it was decided to implement proper controls over the use of state funds, public funds, and political funds as well as to impose strict spending limits on campaigns. Likewise, keeping a close eye on any unnecessary campaign spending. Each political party is required to disclose its campaign budget one week before the election to help the national, regional, and local committees tasked with ensuring a fair and transparent campaign.

Nouadhibou City



Nouadhibou is the economic capital of Mauritania. It is situated on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, so it became the entire country's gate of the world; it is where the iron ore is shipped to Europe every single day. This iron ore comes from the Zouerat city mountains via the world's longest train. Zouerat is the center of mining activities, attracting workers from all over the country, it is also where SNIM is headquartered, the largest national employer, operating the longest train in the world. This shipping train importantly connect towns in the north of Mauritania, bringing water, food, and medicine. This extremely long train caught the attention of dozens of western You Tubers who regularly visited the country to film their adventurous trips in the train's wagons, describing it as the «Sahara Giant» symbolizing life and hope in Mauritanian vast Sahara. The paradox here is that all the natural riches of the country are located in the North, however, the Northern region is the poorest and the least developed.

Nouadhibou and Zouerat cities lie in the middle of Northern African Sahara, along the borders of Morocco and Algeria. This region of the world has not yet been fully explored due to long-standing geographical, and socio-cultural isolation that was deepened by the failure of local leadership and French colonial legacies that continue to influence the system of educa-

tion in the country. However, it happened that high school curriculum in this Sahara focused a little bit on the United States, especially the fields of agriculture, weather, technology, etc. Surely, a very little number of Americans can identify this country on the map. This region is an inexhaustible source of natural riches and racial diversity that extends over thousands of years.

People of Northern African Sahara are generally kind, generous, and love to host guests from all over the world. The people are as open as their Sahara horizons, and value all various colors of life; yet, they have an extremely narrow chance to be featured in global media. Local governments are weak and greatly benefit from the peaceful nature of the Sahara, nomadic people. The people here depended on themselves as well as social and tribal connections, they do not count on governments in doing anything; people here can protest to support Palestinians to get their rights from Israel but will never protest to demand their own basic rights. Due to the lack of civic education, most people in these communities do not grasp the relationship between the governor and the governed, so they are not aware of the constant violations of their basic rights.

Extracted from Dr. Mohamed Yahya Abdel Wedoud's book (From Mauritanian Sahara to the Streets of NEW YORK)



Will the Coup d'état in Burkina Faso Reinforce Russian Influence in the Sahel?

I was on vacation in the Mauritanian countryside when I heard on the radio that there had been a coup in Burkina Faso. I quickly understood that President Putin's appetite was more set than ever on expanding Russian influence through military coups d'état and exercising control over the Sahel, especially France's traditional sphere of influence. Putin seeks to circumvent the Western sanctions regime caused by the war in Ukraine. After Mali and the Central African Republic, it is now Burkina Faso's turn.

Russian flags in Burkina Faso. Washington has warned Ouagadougou against bringing in Wagner.

Russia's relationship with the recent coup d'état in Burkina Faso is slowly coming to light and foreshadows the imminent collapse of Western influence on the continent.

While jihadist operations escalate across the tri-border area between Burkina Faso and the Republics of Mali and Niger, Captain Ibrahim Traoré, 34, has positioned himself as the new head of the military junta in Ouagadougou, following the ousting of the previous coup leader, Lieutenant Colonel Paul Henri Sandaogo Damiba, in the country's second coup in just eight months.

In his first speech last Sunday, Traoré demanded that the countries of the world support his country in overcoming its so-called "critical times," adding, "We will accept any support, whether Russian, American, or any other external forces are ready to help solve the country's security problems."

Along the lines of the revolutionary Burkinabé leader Thomas Sankara, who ruled the country from 1983 to 1987 through a military coup d'état, at the same age as Traoré, the latter closed with the famous phrase «we will start working in the direction we want.»

While some of Traoré's hundreds of supporters flew Russian flags as they roamed the main streets of Ouagadougou, U.S. State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel came out at a news conference warning him against a doomed alliance with Russia.

Patel added that «we have seen in several

cases in Africa alone that the countries where Wagner has deployed have become weaker and less secure," he added, «We condemn any attempt to aggravate the current situation in Burkina Faso and strongly encourage the new transitional government to adhere to the agreed timetable for returning to a democratically elected civilian government.»

Wagner, on the other hand, expressed its willingness to provide substantial and unlimited support to the perpetrators of the coup d'état. The group's leader in the Central African Republic, Alexander Ivanov, issued a statement one day after the coup, expressing unconditional support for the new leader in Ouagadougou and offering him Wagner services to train the Burkinabé army.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the founder of Wagner and a close associate of Putin, wrote a short social media post expressing his support for Captain Ibrahim Traoré and his men, describing them as, «doing what is necessary for their people.»

The demonstrations that took place a few hours before Traoré's coup were not spontaneous but were organized beforehand, as evidenced by the presence of Russian flags and pro-Russian chants denouncing French influence in West Africa. After Wagner, considered a "Russian shadow army," came to dominate the situation in Central Africa, it extended its influence to cover the ruling military junta in Mali and neighboring Burkina Faso. The group has also expanded to Sudan through the commander of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Vice-President of the Sovereign Council «Hemeti.»

Wagner's strategic breakthroughs in West and Central Africa are the result of France and the West's failure to play positive roles in that region, as well as the psychological barrier between them and the peoples they colonized and exploited for resources. Populations in these regions have not seen any significant economic development, despite having gained their independence over half a century ago. France's presence in Africa seems to be going to its inevitable end, with Russia and China standing as attractive alternatives lacking colonial baggage on the continent.

Other Dimensions of the New Coup d'état

Russia has gained increased influence on the African continent. First in Libya, then the Central African Republic, followed by Mali. The Kremlin now appears to be on course to create a new foothold in Burkina Faso, which, despite its poverty, lack of sea access, and small size, has a vital strategic position. Russia has benefited from its political history with Burkina Faso. The country gained independence from France in 1960 under the leadership of Thomas Sankara (1983-1987), a military officer whose communist leanings were the basis for close ties with the Soviet Union and who maintained a cult of personality that exists to this day.

During his rule, Sankara worked to end French hegemony and xenophobic Western imperialism. He paid for his policies with his life when he was killed in a coup d'état, becoming a revolutionary symbol similar to that of Che Guevara in Latin America. Burkinabés continue to chant his famous phrase: «Revolutionaries can be killed, but their thoughts do not die.» Supporters of Russian influence in Burkina Faso have used this same slogan.

One of the most prominent supporters of cooperation with Russia is a movement called «Burkina Faso – Russia.» The group, which includes intellectuals, politicians, jurists, and journalists, organizes pro-Russian activities and demands a «geo-strategic» partnership with Moscow, presenting Russia as an alternative to French influence and calling for the «abolition of secret agreements with Paris.»

In addition to Russia's increasing presence on the street and popular movements in Burkina Faso, there have historically been officials in favor of strengthening relations with Russia. For example, in 2018, the two countries signed an agreement paving the way for the military and security forces of Burkina Faso to obtain «technical support» from Russia, in addition to launching a military and intelligence training program supervised by Russian military personnel. More importantly, however, the agreement signed more than four years ago hinted at Burkina Faso's access to Russian «military equipment and weapons.»

This agreement remained mere ink on paper until last January's coup d'état, when voices within the military began calling for its im-



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plementation and enhanced cooperation with Russia, in the framework of what they called «diversification of partnerships,» to find effective solutions to the terrorism threat plaguing the country. Colonel Paul Henry Damiba, the leader of the first coup, however, did not fully support this idea.

Just before he was overthrown, Damiba had met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of the meetings of the United Nations General Assembly in New York to discuss mechanisms for strengthening cooperation between the two countries. Damiba's office described Russia-Burkina Faso relations as being «old, going back more than 50 years, and today our countries seek to strengthen this relationship to meet the challenges of the present moment.» Indeed, the foreign minister of Burkina Faso, who attended the talks, said in a press statement, « We have a great desire to promote this cooperation, taking it to a profitable level for the two countries.»

Official statements in recent months made it clear that there was a new strategy based on the search for new partners in the fight against terrorist groups, after a growing popular revolt against the French. At the end of August, the Prime Minister of Burkina Faso's Transitional Government, Albert Ouédraogo, announced that Burkina Faso reserved the right to diversify its partners, even if that might disturb historical partnerships, referring to the former colonial power of France, which is the country's largest military and security partner. The Chief Minister was even more vocal when he said, «There are serious questions about the partnership we have with France.»

In Burkina Faso's fight against terrorism, Burkina Faso suffers most from a lack of equipment, weapons, and training. Burkina Faso's new leaders justified their coup with these shortages, and Moscow stands ready to fill this gap. Moscow, however, does not have an embassy in Ouagadougou. Russia is represented in Burkina Faso by the Russian Ambassador to Côte d'Ivoire. Moscow instead has an «honorary consulate» in Ouagadougou, run by Anna Ratchina Coulibaly, a Burkinabé woman of Russian origin, who maintains a robust network in political and cultural circles, as well as in civil society.



■ Protesters in the Burkina Faso capital, Ouagadougou, waving their country's and Russia's flags – AFP

The Key newspaper interviews Guerou Department Deputy

The key : Could you introduce yourself; professional and political career?

A: Thank you for this opportunity and thanks to The Key, a leading media platform, for having me here.

My name is Mohamed Lemine Ahmed Der-guel, I was born in 1971, in Ntakatt (Assaba). I received my primary and secondary education in Guerou and Kiffa, where I received a baccalaureate in 1989. I moved on to the University of Nouakchott's English Department and the following year to the National School of Administration (ENAP), Rabat Morocco, where I studied for two years before returning to the Faculty of Law at the University of Nouakchott, where I obtained a bachelor's degree in public law in 1996.

I worked in the private sector until 2000 when I immigrated to the United States. I worked and studied English at Louisville Community College and then received a diploma in business management from an Institute in Washington, DC.

I returned to Mauritania in mid-2012, prepared to run for the Senate in 2015 before the elections were postponed and the Senate was abolished by a subsequent constitutional amendment. I ran instead for the Guerou seat in Parliament on the Party for the Republic (UPR) ticket. I won the race with a colleague of mine, I'm actually member of the Justice, Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. I'm the president of the Mauritania-UK parliamentary Friendship group, member of the Mauritania-US friendship group.

The key : What is your view on the current state of affairs in Mauritania and what are your thoughts on the agricultural campaign?

A: As you know the global situation generally is difficult. It is characterized by a stagflation caused by the effects of the coronavirus pandemic and the Russian war on Ukraine, the world as we know it is changing fast. (sky rocketing energy cost, food insecurity, the effects of climate change -felt around the world -and so on.

Mauritania has its own geopolitical and economic challenges, being at the middle between two volatile regions the Sahel and the Maghreb, underdevelopment, droughts, fighting terrorism, illegal immigration, etc

Mauritania was able however to secure its borders and protect its territories in a difficult neighborhood, maintains economic growth, relatively succeeded to confront the coronavirus pandemic and presented itself as a safe place for foreign investments.

The country indeed suffers from conditions exacerbated by an unfavorable international conditions, but we stay nevertheless a stable country with promising economic prospects and an optimistic economic outlook for the very near future.

Concerning the agricultural campaign, I believe that it must not be a seasonal effort, but a sustained effort of a conscious agricultural policy that will move the country from food import dependency to self-sufficiency in the very near future. I think the experience of growing 86% of rice locally shows that self-sufficiency in food is possible. We should focus on growing vegetables, wheat, and other grains. We must also empower the mechanization of rain-reliant farming and rehabilitate river tributaries to ensure an important source of food security. I call on



the authorities to further control rainwater by building high-quality dams of different sizes, as millions of cubic meters of water are wasted annually in our country, which suffers from a significant shortage of drinking water. This is a major loss.

It is imperative to work in a more robust way to improve our food and water security. The government is shaping its agricultural policies and injecting money to achieve this goals.

I believe we will get there.

The key : What about Guerou Department that you represent in Parliament and the prospects for its development?

A: The Department of Guerou is an area with a cultural and historical importance that reached the Mashreq and the Maghreb.

Its population is known also for trade and commerce. Most of its young people have migrated, or are in the process of doing so, for studies and/or for improving their lives and the lives of their families. They contribute greatly in bringing foreign currencies to the country.

As most of the country's provinces, we still have issues with the access to electricity, water, quality education, health, city planning, and basic infrastructure. There is no doubt that there has been a significant improvement in recent years, especially in the area of school infrastructure but there is an urgent need for greater attention to local development in general and in Guerou in particular.

This is an opportunity to call for a greater

empowerment of municipal councils and the need to boost their finances and human resources.

Development is local or non-existent.

recently, the Government has established a higher decentralization council on which I am very hopeful will give a roadmap on how we can kick off a new dynamic for local development.

The key : From the perspective of international relations, which is your area of expertise, what is the strategic importance of Mauritanian-American relations?

A: The United States of America is a superpower and is likely to remain so for a time to come, even there is multiple choices to partner with the USA remains a very powerful and important partner.

Its economic and military might, international presence, and technological superiority make it a formidable partner for Mauritania, especially since the two countries are separated by only the Atlantic Ocean. A strong partnership, can bring investments and transfer of technology to Mauritania and benefit the United States greatly, by virtue of Mauritania's strategic position as a link between the Maghreb and the Sahel and given that Mauritania has for some time been the most reliable security partner of the United States in the Sahel. a strategic partnership is possible. One that is built on mutual respect and mutual interests.

Mauritania and the USA have long-standing diplomatic relations. US President Dwight Eisenhower contacted the President Moctar

Ould Daddah on the eve of independence and diplomatic relations were established in the early 1960s. Today, American companies have started investing in Mauritania, especially in the field of energy, a trend that we hope will be strengthened by a win-win approach. It is true that Mauritania has been excluded from the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), and has not «met» the conditions for a Millennium Challenge compact to date, the diplomats of both countries in Washington DC and Nouakchott are working diligently to improve and diversify this important relationship. Mauritanian diplomacy should seize the future United States-Africa summit, which is likely to be attended by President Ghazouani, in order to advance bilateral cooperation and take it to the next level. Sure it is easier said than done, but I think the timing is right.

The relations between the two countries is growing but it can grow more.

the united states already training and equipping some elite units in the army and security apparatus, helping with food security, health, etc But still there is definitely room for improvement toward a strategic relations.

The key : you are working on a research in the field of international relations can you tell us about it.

A: I am indeed conducting master's research in international relations, entitled «Mauritanian-American Relations,» which I hope will make a modest contribution to studying this relationship and show its strengths and weaknesses. I will try to bring some proposals on how to strengthen this important relationship. This research is expected to be presented before the end of this year in the Nouakchott University.

The key : What proposals do you think will be crucial to Mauritania's advancement in gas exploitation?

Mauritania has huge reserves of gas in different gas fields; GTA (with neighboring Senegal), Birallah and Banda among other promising fields.

The GTA will be starting exporting liquified natural gas (LNG) as early as 2023, Birallah was the subject of a recent protocol between Mauritania, BP and Cosmos energy.

In order for Mauritania to maximize its benefits from the important expected rents, we should focus mainly on education, crucial infrastructures, and improve dramatically our governance. We must fight corruption vigorously and revolutionize our outdated administration.

By education, I mean quality education that takes into account the need of the country's labor market and prepares students for future professions in our technology-based world.

Our country needs to pay attention to human resources, which is both the means and the goal of development. Since its independence, our country has suffered from a chronic human resources problems.

We must focus on how to highly educate and train our citizens in the very competitive world of today.

We must pay attention to our society's value system, give opportunities for clean national competencies, and empower young people and women in accordance with our moral values.



The recently ratified Education Reform Directive Law provides a good start to this effort.

Mauritania is a late comer to the gas market, we should multiply our efforts so we can help our people fast and take advantages of our resources before it becomes obsolete.

Mauritania's future as a real player in the energy market is not due only to the important discoveries of gas, but also to huge green hydrogen, wind and solar potentials, the country has a real comparative advantages in this field, the vast territory, wind and sunny days, the proximity to the European market and beyond. ...

The expected energy boom if well exploited and managed can make a huge difference in our lives. (electricity affordability, reliability, add value for our mineral industries, resolve the water shortage by desalination of sea water...etc...

We can potentially be a major player in the world of clean energy (the energy of the future).

The key : The Key is the only English-language media project in the country - how important do you see it as being at present and in the future?

The Key has taken the lead and the responsibility for English-language media in Mauritania. Growing investors, English speakers, and those interested in learning about our country make the need for a robust English-speaking media a necessity. the key is catering for this diverse audience.

I consider its experience worthy of appreciation and respect.

The key : In less than a year, municipal, parliamentary, and regional elections will take place. How do you imagine the future of the political map looking?

Let's me congratulate the national political parties for reaching a consensus on how to make the upcoming elections more credible and transparent.

To your question There is no doubt that the rise in food, fuel prices, the delay of some government projects, the rising cost of living caused partially by conditions beyond the

government control, will make the ruling party's task harder.

Our party will have to explain a lot to citizens, some of whom do not appreciate the exceptional difficulty of global circumstances.

The party is supported by the strong presence of the social aspect of the government action that is very helpful, but challenged by more and more demanding citizens.

As for the traditional opposition, I think it has lost its glamour and has aging slogans I'm afraid it has left its place to opposition populism. Some are pandering to the historical role of grievances of some segments of the society and exploiting them for political and electoral purposes namely the historic shame of slavery that I condemn strongly, The injustices that have occurred in most of the world's countries and their effects are still present here and elsewhere, Others are using social media to spark rumors and misleading news to solicit voters. In all, I think the INSAV Party will find a sufficient majority in the next Parliament, enabling it to govern the country, as well as win significant municipal councils in the future elections.

The key : As you know, the development of rights and democracy is a major problem in our region. How do you assess the level of liberties and rights in Mauritania?

The Mauritanian democracy is a unique one, one that is adapted to local values, it is different than western democracies for sure, different from some neighboring countries too.

Unlike our neighbors in the south we are a stable country. It is true that we still have problems with good governance and that our institutions are relatively fragile, Some of that is due to some historical reasons and some of it is due to «understanding» the relationship between the authorities and institutions. We also lack a professional credible independent investigative media that can expose corruption.

On the question of rights and freedoms in Mauritania, I believe that

the country has made important strides in guaranteeing public and private freedoms, though I do not claim absolute satisfaction with the progress so far. Each country, however, has certain particularities which must be respected. Some of our respected western partners who promote certain rights outside their own countries often have their own internal ills ;Islamophobia, discrimination against minorities and people of color. They also suffer from a high rate of suicide, sexual harassment in the military and various workplaces. Their communities suffer from family disintegration, addiction, armed robberies and the spread of organized crime. So every country has its shortcomings. Mauritania is no exception. We are working with different partners to improve our human right standing, we are making progress and we should continue doing so.

The key : As an MP, what are the most important obstacles to the country's development for you?

Corruption, bad governance and the lack of strategic planning. Corruption squanders the country's wealth and burdens it with debt without development on the ground. Lack of strategic planning makes the decision-maker busy running day-to-day problems rather than finding the solutions to the root problem's. Sixty years after independence and our roads are not good enough and our big cities, including the capital, are without adequate sanitation. Our education system suffers from structural imbalances and its management has serious problems. Most of our elite use the health care system of foreign countries for themselves and their families, teach their children in neighboring countries or beyond or at least in the private sector in a detriment of a robust public services that can uplift the majority of our citizens who cannot afford to have those costly services abroad. This practices are creating wedges between communities and between children and their peers. We should have a stronger public services that brings people together and not tearing them apart.

The new improvements in the health sector and the new Republican School can be a good start, but we have a long way to go.

The key : Are there any last thoughts you would like to share?

Once again, I thank you, and if I may have one last word, it is my call to President Ghazouani, and to the government to do more to overcome the great challenges of our nation.

I congratulate them for the work done and ask for more robust and creative solutions to some pressing needs, like basic services and basic infrastructures.

The future of Mauritania is bright, but it is a future that requires everyone's contribution.

The world around us is fast changing we must do our best to mitigate the multiple challenges we have and take the most advantages of our potentials.

Aware of the regional threats and the enormous international changes and challenges; I call for unity and

the support of the President and his government during this tumultuous period; so we can weather the storm with confidence and courage and win the battle against poverty and underdevelopment.

We must build together a very bright future to our country.

To every Mauritanian citizen I say with Kennedy: Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.

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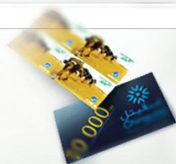
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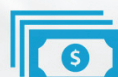
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